

DIVINE VERITY IN CHRIST.

DEATH AND LIFE.

(JOHN v. 19-30; 2 COR. II. 14-17.)

You may wonder why I connect these two scriptures, but I have done so because both really take up the same point; only in John v. the subject is spoken of by Christ Himself, and in 2 Corinthians ii. by the apostle Paul. What I desire to press to-night is the intense solemnity of the things of God. It comes out in the first scripture I read, and indeed we find it all through John's gospel. The passage in 2 Corinthians ii. is very solemn also.

Those here who are familiar with the first Epistle to the Corinthians will remember that the Corinthians were turning round to the thoughts and wisdom of men, and they were not really alive to the intense solemnity of the things of God. They are addressed as the assembly of *God*, and later on the apostle adds, Are ye not conscious that ye are *God's* temple? That was their privilege, but they were not in accord with it, and the apostle has to insist that

the temple of God is holy. Another privilege was theirs, that of the body of *Christ*, and that brought in a measure of responsibility, because Christ and not man is to come out in His body. They were not alive to their privileges or responsibilities, and men's thoughts and opinions governed them. The things of God are so solemn that there is no room for the opinions or ways of men in His assembly. The danger for us to-day is as great as it was in the days of the Corinthians, for the tendency to bring the things of men into the church is as great if not greater than it was with them. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the Laodicean state has come in and is all round us; that state is utter indifference to Christ—neither cold nor hot—and what is of man counted for gain, while there is poverty as to Christ. I quite admit that the Lord's words to Laodicea, and the threat to spue it out of His mouth, point to utterly unconverted people—mere professors; but then whatever may be the characteristic state of the church, looked at in its responsible condition, is liable more or less to affect the faithful who are in the midst of such a state of things. Hence there is danger lest we should be affected by the pretensions of men, through indifference to the claims of Christ. He must have the first and paramount place in our hearts. Declension

began in Ephesus—"Thou hast left thy first love." Christ had not His paramount place, and we may ask ourselves if we give Him the first place in our hearts. We should all admit that He ought to have it, but how far do we allow other things to govern us. We may disallow the wicked things of the world, and yet the things of this life—business matters and even domestic duties—may be uppermost in our minds and thoughts. Nothing perhaps characterises men more at the present time than building up the commercial system of this world, and it constitutes a very real danger to us. We are those who have been awakened to the coming of Christ, and we profess to be waiting for Him. I am afraid it has a little dropped out of our thoughts; other important points have occupied us, and there is a tendency when a truth of great importance becomes prominent to let some other of equal importance drop into the background. I should like to see the patient waiting for Christ revived in every heart. If we were waiting for Christ, I am sure He would get a prominent place in our souls, and we should regard our daily business, our family duties, and even our service to the Lord in a different light. I was greatly struck with a remark made the other day by a young Christian who had just sought fellowship. She said to me, and I like to repeat it,

“Ever since I have seen that my life is hid with Christ in God, everything looks different.” She looked at things with different eyes. I could not have said anything more pertinent, though much older. The one who believes and knows that it has a secret place with Christ in the presence of God must look at everything here in a different way. All the circumstances through which we pass are looked at from that standpoint. Everything would appear in a different light if we realised the great fact that our life is hid with Christ in God.

In the fifth chapter of John two things come before us in the verses I read. One is, that the Lord Jesus is the bringer-in of life; and the other, that He executes judgment. He brings in life from another world; it is not that He revives man's life in this world, but He quickens with the life which is in Himself, and He was the Sent One from the Father. In a certain sense He did revive the man at the pool of Bethesda; he is made whole after thirty-eight years of infirmity, but it does not go further than this, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” Then the Lord speaks of greater works than raising up from a bed of infirmity. The impotent man is doubtless a figure of Israel's condition under law: they will be set up in the earth by Christ, and in a certain way it will be a

revival to life of the nation ; but before that could really take place, Christ must die and rise again in order that resurrection life may be brought in, for Israel will be revived not only from the place of infirmity, but from death in all its moral bearing upon them. We read of the spared remnant of Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust." (Isa. xxix. 4.) They are brought to the gates of death, though it is not actual death. We can understand how this can be by the illustration of a person brought to the point of death, so that life seems to be gone from the earth, and then raised up again as from the very jaws of death. I have known such a case, and the past history seemed to have been left behind in death. Thus Israel will be revived; the only possible way in which man can be set up is by obliterating all that he was as alive in his past history of sins, and setting him up in Christ. This has been effected for God in Christ's death so that there might be newness of life through His resurrection ; but Israel will have to be brought into the reality of it, they will pass through the great tribulation, and when all is apparently in the dust of death, Christ in resurrection power will bring them out of it, and set them on new ground altogether, though in the earth. We get a higher place in association

with Christ beyond death in the sphere of His life, though while here we learn something of what it is to have the sentence of death in ourselves. With us it is not only that the power of Christ's resurrection is brought to us for deliverance, but we are privileged to take the place of risen *with Him*. Hence the Lord speaks of greater works than raising up from a bed of infirmity, and that was "raising up the dead and quickening *them*."

But what I want to press is that this is the Father's work, and the Son was carrying out this work of the Father; "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It is all in connection with another world. If any one were brought down to death's door, and raised up again from the lowest extremity to life in this world, it is a thing that comes within the cognisance of man; but that any one should be quickened with life from another world, no one can understand until they become the subjects of the quickening power of the Spirit of Christ. Every one must admit that the Son came from another world; indeed the great point of faith in verse 24 is that the Father sent Him. He was here to do the Father's work as sent of Him. It was not merely that He was the blessed Man down here, anointed by the Holy Ghost, so that He went about doing good; He healed lepers, gave sight to the blind,

made the deaf to hear, and the lame man to leap as an hart; all that is God's power brought into the circumstances of men, and it comes within the cognisance of men, but it is not that which is before us when we read of the Father's work. There was that which was in the thought and mind of the Father for man, and the Son was here to carry out that work. It is blessed to see the Lord Jesus down here in the circumstances of men, so that He could feel for them and relieve them. "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses," and we can understand the grace in which He acted, so that virtue went out to heal all that came to Him. But here we have what is introduced from another world; the Father's work in raising up the dead and quickening them, and the Son quickening whom He will, belong to the world of the Father's purpose from which the Son came. There can be no question that in everything He did down here the Father's grace was manifested, as He said, "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works;" but they were not what is here spoken of as the Father's work—quickenings in view of another world.

I now turn to the second point—judgment. This is not at all the Father's work. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." If we apprehend

this it will the more throw into relief the Father's work. There is a sovereignty of love in it, and the grace which acts towards us is the fruit of that love which was in the Father's bosom where the Son ever abode. Raising up the dead and quickening them is according to the Father's counsels in His Son. It was in the Father's mind to quicken with life which belonged to the circle of divine love, and the revelation of that love was made to us in the Son of His love. Judgment is connected with the sphere of man's responsibility, not with the sphere of the Father's purpose. The Father does not judge; God, as God, is the Judge of all; but when we come to the person who judges, it is the Son to whom judgment is committed, because He is the Son of man. There is the judgment of man as responsible for his deeds, and by judgment the Father secures the honour of His Son. The Father's name is entirely associated with grace and divine purpose. "The Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them." If these two things take their proper place in our minds, we shall have a deep sense that the Father's grace raises up out of this scene in order that man may live in another, while on the other hand judgment is the close of this scene. Judgment must be, but it is not the Father's work. Because the Son was here in humiliation and doing the Father's work, man

might have thought that the Son was not to be honoured; but the Father secures the glory of the Son by giving all judgment into His hand. The Son of man is Judge, and there cannot be a greater witness to judgment than the fact that He who judges has already been under the judgment. The Lord takes this ground in Luke xii.: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" The fire of judgment was about to be kindled on Him. In Jonah we have another illustration of the same thing. He was sent with the message of judgment to Nineveh—"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." He preached of coming judgment to the men of Nineveh. But who was it that preached? It was one who had himself been down under the judgment of God. He had been three days and nights in "the belly of hell." That was the preacher. He was in himself a sign to the Ninevites of the judgment he preached. So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ, He who will judge has been under the judgment of God. His authority to judge is given of the Father, but the judgment has already been made manifest in His person. The whole sphere here is under the judgment of death, for the only One who had the title to live went into death, proving that all were under death; but He died in order that He might annul it.

He also *suffered*—"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." We read of "the sufferings of Christ." No one could in spirit visit Gethsemane, and there contemplate what the cup was to Christ which He had to drink, without feeling that judgment is a deeply solemn reality. He tasted death, but connected with it there was deep, deep suffering. He was there in the judgment of Calvary meeting the holiness of God in respect of sin, and how can we treat that lightly? The Son of God has come into the world and brought with Him the revelation of God in grace, and also of the Father's counsels of grace in Himself, the Son of His love; then He secured the glory of God in sufferings and death, so that there might be an open door for the light of the Father's world to shine. Hence it must be one of two things. Either a man must bow to the revelation of God in grace and see that Christ has borne the judgment for him, or he must receive judgment from Christ. Therefore what we get in this chapter, brought before us in a deeply solemn way, is the question of life and judgment—we may say of life and death. And this is a question which each one has to face in the experience of their souls. Oftentimes the Lord Jesus Christ having suffered and died is only looked at as the way of escape from judgment, but we have to face in our own

souls the question of life and death. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.*" Israel had to drink the waters of Marah. There was no *taste for them* of judgment in the death of the Passover lamb, nor in the passage of the Red Sea. The rod of judgment smote the sea, and made a way for them to escape, while the waters overwhelmed the enemy when the rod was again stretched out. It was escape for them and judgment on the enemy; but when they came to Marah they had, so to speak, to arm themselves with the same mind and suffer in the flesh in drinking the bitter waters. Flesh is the condition in which Christ suffered for us, for ours is sinful flesh, and we have to take into account that Christ has once suffered for sins, therefore we must arm ourselves with the same mind. The apostle adds: "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin," that is, the sense of Christ's suffering for sin is taken home to the soul, and the mind is brought into accord with His cross, and then we do not sin. We have to face this question of death and life, for Christ died to sin and lives to God.

I have been looking at how the truth as to death and judgment and as to life came out in the Lord Jesus Christ. He brought life for us from another world. He was given to have

life in Himself as a blessed Man here that He might be the well-spring of life to us. His was a life of blessed, holy love. He lived in the bosom of the Father, and the love that was there was perfectly expressed in His life. Every thought of divine love was expressed in Him. We have seen too that judgment was expressed in Him. It was not merely that He spoke of judgment, or that He will sit upon the throne and judge. This He did and will do, but in His cross we get the full expression of God's holy judgment. He has been in it and will judge according to what was expressed there. Thank God, the believer will never come into judgment, for Christ has borne it. Now what came out in the fulness of truth in Christ came out in measure in His servant Paul. He speaks of himself in 2 Corinthians ii. as being "a sweet savour of Christ." He prefaces this by saying, "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ," or as it should be more correctly translated, "leads us in triumph in the Christ." It is not that *Paul* was triumphing. It is Christ who is in triumph, and Paul was part of Christ's triumph. He had been what I may call the most successful general of Satan in his opposition to Christ, and Christ had conquered him, and now led him in triumph. On the road to Damascus when he was in determined

opposition to Christ—the very arch-enemy of the Saviour—then the Lord met him, and, in the brightness of a glory that he could not gainsay, smote him to the ground in utter weakness. There and then Paul got the sentence of death in his soul, and yet he did not die. The Lord spoke to him in the gentlest way, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?” He could have consumed him with the breath of His mouth, but instead He only laid him low with the brightness of His glory. Can you suppose for a moment a single hand-to-hand combat between a man and his foe, and the man is down at the mercy of his opponent; such was Saul, he was down completely at the mercy of the Lord. What will the Lord say to him? “Rise up, and stand upon thy feet.” Death was due to him, and he must have tasted it in his soul, but he rises up at the word of Christ, and is led by the hand in utter weakness into Damascus. The lion has become a lamb, and Saul bows down to Christ, from henceforth he is Christ’s captive. While in Damascus with the sentence of death in his soul, he gets a message from the hand of Ananias, and the Spirit sets him free in the life of Christ. That man is no longer his own; he belongs to Christ; he is the great witness of the triumph of Christ, and wherever he is led the savour of the knowledge of Christ is made manifest in him. How

the triumph of Christ is witnessed in his ministry, and the gospel was expressed in his person. Jonah was a witness of judgment, but also of salvation out of judgment. Paul carried with him the savour of death and the savour of life; he had known the sentence of death in no ordinary way; but Christ had died for him, and now Christ was his life. There was no lightness in Paul's preaching of the gospel. The Corinthians might have thought that he used lightness, when he purposed to pass through Macedonia to Corinth and yet did not carry out his purpose. No, he not only knew that every promise of God was Yea and Amen in Christ, but the gospel was with him a question of death or life, and it was witnessed in his own person. It is remarkable how closely Paul was identified with the pathway of his Master. None but Christ could take up the question of judgment, and none but He could quicken; but Paul, led in triumph in Christ, manifested in his own person the savour of Christ, he did not merely *speak* of death and life, but if there was not submission to Christ, he was the savour of death unto death to such, and of life unto life unto the saved. A little further on (2 Cor. iv. 3) he says, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which

believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." No preacher could exactly say that now. It was a favour granted to Paul that the light of the glory of Christ should shine in his heart, and not only so, but he was an exponent of the gospel of the glory which he proclaimed; hence he says, "By *manifestation* of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Thus everything connected with the gospel he preached was a very solemn reality, there was no lightness with him, no "may be" or "perchance." It would not do in a question of life or death. Paul so preached the gospel, and the truth was so manifested in him, that if his gospel was veiled to any it proved they were perishing, lost. *We* might say that we had not set it forth fully, and in ourselves there might be "a dark part," a hindrance to its light. Not so with Paul, he was so disciplined as to himself and supported by Christ, that it was not as with Moses, who put a veil over his face, but the light shone out, he, so to speak, put no veil over the glory of Christ. In him the glad tidings of Christ had a clear manifestation. He was "the chief of sinners," and a living testimony of the triumph and grace of Christ. If any man did not believe Paul's gospel it proved that

the man was blinded by the god of this world.

Now if we cannot exactly speak as Paul did yet we can enter into the spirit of it, and feel the intense reality of the issues consequent on the death of Christ, the issues of death and life. When we see a man like Paul with energy of character, ability, learning and morality brought down into death by the glory of Christ and getting his end there, and then raised up in the power of Christ's life, we cannot use lightness as to such a gospel. Paul himself was a sweet savour of Christ, and yet a savour of death unto death in them that perish, and of life unto life in the saved. There is no question here of palliation, or of the revival of the man in himself, but of death in the man and life in Christ.

I pass on now to the well-known verse (John v. 24), "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." Mark those words "death unto life." Then notice what precedes them. "He that heareth my word." It may appear very simple that if Christ speaks, a person listens; but that is not all—"He that heareth" gives the character of the person. He is a hearer of Christ, as Mary was; Christ has his ear. Now, whoever has your

ear you are servant to, in a sense. Of old, if a servant said "I love my master I will not go out free," then he was brought to the doorpost, and his master bored his ear through with an awl; and "he shall serve him for ever." (Exo. xxi. 5, 6.) That man's ear belonged to his master for ever. "He that heareth" implies that Christ has got your ear. I do not want to do away with the general thought, that a person hears the word of Christ and believing has eternal life, but the passage goes farther than that. The great point is that Christ was here as sent of the Father, and His word made known what was in the Father's heart; it brings with it the knowledge of God in grace. The Son came as sent of the Father. If Christ has our ear, that which He communicates is paramount with us. It is not how much we understand, but Christ is supreme as sent of the Father, and now the Spirit teaches of Him. I know how the word "hath" has been emphatically dwelt upon, to the weakening of the force of the passage. The hearer of Christ's word will give good heed to the whole Bible, but the point is, that the Father was speaking in the Son; He came down from heaven and knew all that was there. (Compare chap. iii. 12, 13.) He spoke words of life which came from another world. We may be slow in understanding them, but

ought we not to listen? Does He not claim our ear? Christ was not here to speak of judgment, but of the Father's grace and love. He did not speak of judgment to Paul, the tone of His voice was that of compassion, and Paul listened. See the result: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His ear belonged to the Lord Jesus from that moment. He is led by the hand according to the Lord's word; it is Christ's triumph in which he is really led. Led about everywhere—Troas, Macedonia, Corinth; he was not doing his own will, nor did he assume in anywise to be great, but he took the low place as Christ's captive. He was down here in weakness, an outcast as Christ had been; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifest in his body; not doing his own will, but Christ's bondman. Paul was the veritable exponent of the glad tidings, as Jonah had been of his message. In Christ we have the truth. He came from the place of light and life and love, and what He said was not merely true, but He was the truth. He has come, and we are bound to listen. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me." Who sent Him? The Father sent Him, and the life He gives is the life that belongs to another world. What love! Not a man revived in the life that belongs to this world,

that is gone in death. Paul realised it as gone in death when down at the feet of Christ, then came the word "Arise," and afterwards he gets the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, life that belonged to another world—eternal life. And what then? "Shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." It is the effect of hearing Christ's word. His is a well-known voice. Suppose that you hear a voice calling a child by name, it may be unknown to you, but it is well known to the child, it is his father's voice. There is an unmistakable tone in the voice of Jesus the Son of God. What He speaks, what He communicates, tells us who it is that speaks. It is HE that speaks, and His voice is heard, and in His voice there is life and power. We pass from the sphere of death to the sphere of His life.

May the Lord give us a sense of the deep solemnity of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Life and death come out in all their distinctness now that the light of Christ's glory has shone. May we be preserved from Laodicean indifference, and be characterised by hearing Christ's word, so that what He speaks may be paramount with us.



WHENCE IS THE CHRISTIAN'S RESOURCE ?

(MARK VI. 1-6 ; 30-52.)

I WAS speaking last week of the way in which life came into this world from another sphere, and that it was not in God's mind to revive man save on the ground of death and resurrection. Israel will have their place in this earth, but as those brought up from the dead. It is not the old state revived at all. God brings in what is new, and all comes from heaven. Blessing does not spring out of the earth, nor can it come from man. God brings it in from another scene, and brings it in by Christ. We have an illustration of this in the Psalms. In Psalm xliv. (which is quoted in Rom. viii.) there is an appeal from Israel to God, and in it they go back to former times, what they had heard from their fathers of the works that God wrought of old, and they desire the same kind of delivering power to be exercised for them. The verse quoted in Romans viii. : "For thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter," shews what a desperate state they had been brought into. Now the

answer to Psalm xliv. is Psalm xlv. It is the bringing in of the King and His power and kingdom. Thus the answer comes, and not by the revival of Israel as in the old times. The King comes in grace, and His throne is the throne of God (for He is God) established in righteousness. Jerusalem or the remnant of Israel are set up in the King, and the old estate has to be forgotten. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." Imagine what that was to a Jew! Forget thine own people—forget that they were Israelites and Abraham their father! The hope is not in the fathers, but in the King—in Christ who comes in from heaven. Hence the promise is, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children." The King does not spring up from them according to the flesh. "Now they shall say, We have no king." (Hos. x. 3.) He is known of them in resurrection, and comes in from another sphere. When the new Jerusalem is seen descending out of heaven in the day when the King will reign, all ministry is out of it, even angelic ministry belongs then to the heavenly city; all blessing, whether for Israel or the nations, comes out of heaven through the holy city.

I have said so much in order that I may connect my present subject with what went before. But I desire to shew you how the previous chapters in Mark lead up to the one from which I have read. In chapter iv. we have Christ as the Sower of the word and that which is connected with it, and in chapter v. we have delivering power. No one ever preached the word like Christ. Perhaps Paul followed most closely in His steps. But there could be no possible flaw in the preaching of Christ. The apostles were wonderfully sustained in their testimony. With regard to the twelve, the Lord prayed in John xvii. "that they may be one, as we are." There could be no possible divergence in thought or word between the Son and the Father, and the apostles were kept in the same unity. So with Paul, he so preached the gospel that if it was hid to any it was not because of Paul's preaching, but because their minds were blinded by the god of this world; and, again, to the Corinthians he wrote, "Ye are not straitened in us." But the great Sower of the word was the Lord, others could only follow. None could be like Him, for He was the Word, He was that which He sowed, and the sowing was perfect. What I want now to press is that the Word comes from another sphere. If we take the scriptures in our hand,

it is no production of this world, the thoughts of men as such are not in it, but the thoughts and mind of God. Men lived in this world who wrote it, and they record what took place in this world also, but the record is inspired; the Holy Ghost moved holy men to write it. It is God who looks down and gives His account of things on earth. Many a thing God speaks of which man would have omitted from the record. But more than this, Christ spoke of heavenly things. Christ proclaimed the testimony of God here so that where the seed was received into good ground there men's hearts were formed by the word in the mind of God. Man naturally is formed by the ideas which prevail in the world, but when the word is received in the inner being of a man he is formed in divine ideas. It is a great thing to think according to the word of God. One may know its doctrines and subjects, but it is a different thing to so know the word of God that you think in it, and the consequence is that the moral being is built up in divine ideas. When we were of the world we were formed by the world—people do not like to be singular or to differ from what obtains in the world—but the word of God forms a new moral being after Christ. There is no need to go through the world making oneself conspicuous by peculiarity, the great thing is to be governed by principles

which are not of the world, so that we may present them in our conduct, and thus that others may say, "I would like to know the spring of such an one's conduct," and then learn that heavenly principles were governing our souls, the principles of one who listens to the word of Christ and is formed by them.

Another thing we see in Christ is delivering power; not only is the inner man formed by His word, but we are actually in a world where hostile power is against us, and in a condition, with sin in us, which lays us open to be affected by the power of the adversary. In chapter v. we see deliverance brought to men. Man may not know it, but he is more or less under the power of Satan, and Christ alone can deliver. The man with the legion was no doubt possessed, it was an extreme case, but that only shews how the Lord's power can be exercised for us. Nor could man bring any relief. Spite of all that was done the man was driven by Satan. This was an individual case, and figurative of the state of the Jewish nation; but the figure applies universally, and when Satan drives, man is only like a straw before the wind. Thank God for the various ways in which we are sheltered from the power of Satan. A young man in his father's house is sheltered, but the time comes when he leaves it for a situation, and breaks loose as

people say. What power is behind it? There is a power which drives men beyond what is even human. The world is full of restraints— asylums, homes, societies, prisons. Men try to put bands by government and law, and it is right, but bands are broken, and Satan's power drives man on. Man instead of being in his right mind lives among the things of death— then there is indwelling sin, an incurable disease figured by the woman with the issue of blood; and he is under the power and shadow of death. Christ has brought in delivering power.

Chapter vi. brings us to a turning-point in connection with the ministry of Christ, which sooner or later applies itself to each of us. "From whence hath this man these things, and what wisdom is this which is given unto him?" A moment comes in the history of a soul when it has to stop and think. Where is all this from? Many a one has heard the word of God and believed it when preached, and that is right; or a child may have been taught by its parents, and that is God's ordered way (Prov. i. 8; Psa. lxxviii. 5, 6); but the time comes when the question has to be faced, "Whence is Christ's teaching? Is it an element of the wisdom of this world?" It is true Christ is not here, but Christianity is here. The Spirit is here. We have the word of God authoritatively in

scripture, and again and again its effects on men call attention to it. If man is delivered from Satan's power, and formed anew by the word of God, it must claim attention, but whence is it? Even with those who are converted, a great deal may have been received as truth and its power known, without the question having been definitely faced whence is it? What wisdom is this? Once admit that it is from heaven; that Jesus the Son of God proclaims to you the wisdom of God; and that what you have heard from your parents, or received through servants of the Lord, has its verification in Him who is I AM, and you have another power in your soul. What you have already received is not of man but of Him. It came into this world. He brought it, but it is not of this world, but from heaven. Timothy knew the holy scriptures from a child, but to make wise unto salvation must be added "through faith which is in Christ Jesus." And now, who was Jesus in His own country where He was known best? "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" That is how they thought of Him; and are there not many in this day who look on Christianity as something of man? [and men have their own opinions about it, they think they know and are competent to criticise the wisdom of God. We are liable to be affected by what is around us, and

it is possible for Christians to go quietly along in what they have received without knowing *whence* they have received it. Christianity is true, blessedly true, but we want to have the consciousness that it is not of this world as Christ was not of this world, but from heaven. Later on in this gospel the chief priests and elders raised the question as to the Lord's authority, and He met it by another question which compelled them to say that they did not know what was of heaven or what was from men; and men are just as incompetent to-day. Did the doctrine and wisdom of Christ come from the house of Joseph the carpenter? Ah no! it was from heaven. And so Christianity now is connected with the blessed Man who is in heaven. He came from thence, from the Father, and He is gone back there.

Next we find the Lord sending out the twelve. They preached that men should repent and confirmed the testimony by healing the sick. It had the character of a final testimony to Israel. Hence the Lord says, "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them." If it was not received, there would be judgment, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city." But the preach-

ing and power of the kingdom of God command attention, and the testimony to Christ reaches the ears of King Herod. His kingdom was really apostate; it was the result of Israel's apostasy. I doubt not the hideous and terrible state of Israel is brought out here. Herodias was really representative of Israel unfaithful to and apostate from Jehovah, rejecting Christ and accepting antichrist. In Isaiah Israel is charged thus: "Thou wentest to the king with ointment." (Chap. lvii. 9.) Herod, the apostate power, comes before us as the murderer of the witness of Christ, and that at the instigation of Herodias. What a picture is presented to us! In His own country Christ is without honour; but more, Israel is really in league with an apostate power, the murderer of Christ's witness. In Matthew's gospel we find that the death of John the Baptist is the occasion for the Lord to retreat with His disciples into the wilderness. "When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart." (Matt. xiv. 13.) In that way He trod beforehand the path which the persecuted remnant will have to take in the time of antichrist; but here we have another reason: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." He takes them aside from the many

coming and going into His own company. It is very good for us to be withdrawn from this thing and that into the company of Christ. There we learn Himself, whence He is, and are away from the world and its goings and comings. In the present moment we are in the midst of that which is apostate from Christ. The church has sunk into the world instead of being true to Him. It may seem hard to say, but where is the true affection that befits the bride of Christ, that will give up all for Him? What have *we* given up for Him? How often are professing Christians found in the swing of the world. I think that admitting every plea as to business and family cares, we must own that the Lord's words to Ephesus at the first, "Nevertheless I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love," are more than applicable now, and such a charge indicated the beginning of apostasy. Apostasy may sound a hard word, as if it referred to some horrible infidelity, and so it does; there is infidelity as to Christ around us, as to His love to the church, as to His being the Bridegroom and as to His coming again. Where are the people who are waiting for Christ—the bridal affection that loves Him and waits for Him?

I have sought to shew you that Christ introduces everything He ministers from another

scene, and if that be so, we must feel the importance of being withdrawn from the many coming and going so that we may learn Himself. The disciples had been chosen to carry out the ministry of Christ, and they would have to take Christ's place in the world when He went away. The church is now the vessel of the testimony of Christ. This may not be understood, but every Christian ought to walk as Christ walked, and so continue the walk of Christ here on earth. He walked here according to the Father's good pleasure, and Christians are to continue this, and to this end God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. Christ walked here finding all His springs in heaven, and yet in perfect grace in the midst of a world of sin, and we are set here to continue the path of Christ, to walk as He walked on earth. It is aside with Him privately that we learn of Him, and it is in that retirement that we learn to serve.

Hence the next thing we meet is not apostate Israel, the Lord and His disciples are apart from that, but a multitude with want and need, uncared for by those who should have been shepherds, a company who moved the compassion of Jesus. There in the desert place He taught His disciples how to minister to the need which is found in this world. We find the same two things here as in the previous chapters: His word—"He

began to teach them many things"—and His hand which supplied their need. Now the disciples were not fully in the mind of their Master; they would send the multitude away, and He could not do that. Hence He says, "Give ye them to eat." But they are not in the secret of heavenly grace; they are looking to earth for supplies, "Shall we go and buy?" Note the Lord's answer, "How many loaves have YE?" What have *you* got? Only five loaves! Very little! But the Lord takes them. We may know very little of the things of Christ, but it is a great thing to apprehend that He can enlarge the little we have, as Elisha did the widow's pot of oil. The disciples had but five loaves, but He took them and looked up *to heaven* and blessed. It was the bounty and blessing of heaven, and He used His disciples to distribute it, as well as taught them the fulness of resource they had in Him. Christendom is really apostate from Christ, and this world is a desert place, but the disciples learned the resources of heaven, and the heart of their Master; He taught them how to serve.

Having dismissed the multitude, He went up into a mountain to pray, and He constrained His disciples to get into a ship and go to the other side. To meet the adverse winds and waves is a different thing from being in a secret place with

Christ, in the sanctuary of His own company where we learn Himself. But God's way is in the sea as well as in the sanctuary, and the world is not only a desert place, but a place where we have to meet the spiritual powers of wickedness. It was Satan's power, the prince of the power of the air, that raised the contrary wind. This world is not a place where we are to stay, it is a desert place where we have to learn the sufficiency of Christ and to minister to others out of it not to stop, and hence He constrained His disciples to go to the other side. It is so with us. Christ has gone on high, and we have to cross the stormy waves of this world; but He is there in intercession, and He watches us here below. "He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary." He knows the adverse power and the circumstances we are in. Then in the morning watch He came to them. We have not here the account of Peter walking on the water, but we are engaged with the great point that *He came to them* walking on the water. He came to them in a power that was superior to the whole force of the contrary wind; it was the same power in which He rose from the dead and brought to nothing the power of Satan. This was fulfilled to them (according to His word, "I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you") on the resurrection day. He came to

them in the power that annulled death, and the church knows Him in that power by the Spirit given to us. To walk on the water was not a power of this world, not did it belong to men, but Christ could. He has gone on high, and the world sees Him no more; but we see Him in resurrection life, in a power superior to all the force of the enemy. Satan put forth all his power at the cross, and the Lord is risen superior to it. It was not possible that He should be holden of death, and in the power of resurrection He came back to His disciples on the first day of the week, and the church has not lost His presence. In one sense He has gone on high and is interceding for His people, and in another sense they know His presence as having come back to them, as He said, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." For us, the sense of this is dependent upon the presence of the Comforter. It is a wonderful thing to know Christ.

The Lord was preparing His disciples for their service after His departure; they would know the world as a desert place, where dearth and need are, and they would in their testimony have to encounter the opposition of spiritual wickedness. Hence He drew them aside into His own company in the desert; and though they appeared lonely in the midst of the sea, yet He had been

watching them, and in the morning watch came to them, and gave them His company—"He talked with them." When the Lord was about to go on high (for His departure into a mountain to pray was a figure of it), He said to His disciples, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." He was to be the Object of their faith in heaven. They had believed on Him here as the Sent One of the Father. "They have believed that thou didst send me." After His departure they were to believe on Him there. One consequence of this faith would be that which is expressed in the words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father." Why? Because, I think, they would be conscious of resurrection power having come in to make good everything that God has purposed in Christ. The effort of the enemy is against the testimony of Christ, but every opposition only manifests that Satan cannot sink the vessel of testimony, because it is watched over by Christ, and He is with His people to carry them through, and make them superior to all the force which is against us. The time is not come to put all enemies down, but there is power in Christ for overcoming.

"He went up unto them into the ship, and the

wind ceased." When He rejoined His disciples on the first day of the week in the power of resurrection, He said, "Peace be unto you." He rejoined them, and so to speak, the wind ceased. Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and that would be their power for service. But more than that, the Spirit has come as the *Comforter* according to the Lord's word, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." The Comforter has come to be a help to us, and what a Helper He is. He occupies us with Christ in the place where He is, and teaches us of all that He was when down here, so that we should be able to be for Him in this scene, though not of it nor expecting anything from it, nor seeking to go through it by human power or effort. Christendom to-day is the result of human effort, and human means are employed in it. The great thing for us is to be withdrawn from the sphere of man's activity, so that we may know the company of Christ, there we can draw from His resources, and learn to have His compassions. We may have but little, but if put into the hand of Christ, it may and can be greatly multiplied. How effective often has one text of scripture been, when it has been used in the faith of Christ's power to bless it.

The opposition of spiritual wickedness in heavenly places is against the truth of Christ on high, it would oppose their progress "to the other side," and it seeks to nullify our heavenly calling, and make us earthly minded. We need for this to be conscious of the intercession of Christ on high, and also to know the company of Christ in resurrection life and power, the Comforter making it a present reality to our souls. It is a great thing to know Christ Himself, and not merely certain truths about Him. He came from heaven, and introduced what is of heaven into a place of death and need while He was here; and now He is gone to heaven, and we have to continue His path down here; there is opposition, but He has come to His people in a power that makes us superior to it, and gives us to know Him as One that talks with us.



THE MINISTRATION OF CHRIST.

(2 COR. v. 12-20.)

THIS passage gives us the close of the apostle's description of his ministry. What is specially brought out in these verses is the ministry of reconciliation which was committed to him; but what I want to dwell on is the character of the apostle's ministry as a whole, and how it was exemplified in himself. To me it is a great comfort to see how God could frame a vessel, and support it, so that the ministry put in it should not suffer from the weakness of the earthen vessel, but that there should through His grace and power be an expression of what God has in His mind for His people; for God has a certain thought in His mind for each one, even the youngest believer here. He will carry out His purpose with regard to us without any failure on His part, but He also wants that we should know and enter into that purpose, and therefore He communicates it through His word. We can see that if a communication comes to us from God how important it is that we should receive the communication exactly as it was sent. But there is another thing, not

only that the words of the messenger are true, but what we see brought out in this epistle is that the truth was commended by the apostle himself. What God speaks to us about is so entirely outside of the thoughts and order of the mind of man, that the mere words of men would not convey it to us; hence the apostle was a minister not of letter but of spirit. He used great plainness of speech, but that did not adapt itself to the mere mind of man. People may understand words, and yet not really grasp the thing spoken of. Now in Paul, and indeed it was so in the other apostles, we get an exemplification of that which he taught. They spoke in words which were taught them by the Holy Ghost, but there was the *manifestation* of the truth in them. We find this word recurring in this epistle, notably in chapter iv. 2, "By *manifestation* of the truth commending *ourselves* [not commending our words] to every man's conscience in the sight of God." So again in this chapter we read, "*We* are made *manifest* unto God; and I trust also are *made manifest* in your consciences." It was not merely that in the sight of God he spoke what was true, but the vessel was so disciplined that the truth got its manifestation and expression in it. With the Lord Jesus Christ all was in that line. He was the perfect minister of the truth because He was

the truth. Paul was not that, nor could we for one moment think of ranking Paul with Christ, for Christ was the source of his ministry, and what he ministered was Christ. Yet the Lord was a Minister, but His ministry was of and from Himself and His Father. He was Himself that which He spoke, hence we see perfectly set forth in Him all that was in the mind and purpose of God for us. He and His Father were one in purpose and thought, but He became Man that it might be set forth in Him. He spoke to men of God, but then He was God and the light of the revelation of God shone in Him. He spoke to men of what they were, of what the world was, and of the sin in it; but He was the light which made all manifest. He spoke of the love of God, of His grace, His righteousness, His holiness, but all this came out in Himself, and in Him the purpose of God for man is now set forth. He is the Beginning, and the Builder-up of a system of holy love and righteous government that shall be to God's praise for ever. There is no purpose of God but is made known to us in Christ, for He is the Yea and Amen in whom all is established. Hence in Christ there is divine verity for the simplest soul. It was Christ as Yea and Amen that Paul preached, but God so supported the vessel that there was no failure in the ministry,

and the thoughts of God as to us in Christ were presented as Paul received them, so as to reach the feeblest believer.

Now it is this ministry carried out by Paul which we have in this epistle; it was the ministry of *Christ*, and we have the record of it here. The simplicity of it and the manifestation of Christ in Paul should be a comfort now to each one of us, even the youngest. It is possible that a young Christian may say, "I do not understand the things you speak about." I would say to him, Look at Christ; learn of Him. See the Spirit in which He moved down here, and the way in which He did everything, "He hath done all things well." Always well pleasing to God. As you look at Him, what a picture is presented to you! He is God's Son, and yet the blessed Man in whom all His pleasure is set forth. It is not merely words we have to receive and understand, but to be alive and awake to what there is in Christ, as we trace His downstooping from the glory to the manger, from the manger to the cross, and from the cross back again to the glory; where He is the blessed Centre of all the counsel and purpose of God. When we look at ourselves we see what a contrast there is, and though we receive from Him out of His fulness, yet how often is the living water that He gives

dimmed in its lustre by the vessel. And if the truth is clouded in our own souls it must be presented by us in a cloudy way. This makes us feel the seriousness of ministry, and that it is a serious matter to minister the things of the Lord; our only ability is in His support, and in the consciousness that He can so deal with the vessel that there shall be an inlet into our souls for the truth and grace which are in Christ. All flows purely from Him, and it is very encouraging to see in Paul (and in the twelve also) that it was committed to earthen vessels that the excellency of the power might be of Christ, so that what was of Christ might be ministered as purely as they received it, to the encouragement and building up of the saints. The twelve were witnesses of what Christ was on earth. The testimony of Paul was connected with Christ glorified, as we read in Acts xxvi. 16: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." He had seen Christ in glory, and the light of the glory of God in His person had shone into Paul, so that the light might be given out, and God disciplined the vessel so that its lustre should not be dimmed. The vessel was so ordered and preserved, that the living water which came into it from Christ

might be effective, not only in responsive affections, but also in the testimony for Christ. In John iv. we see the Spirit of Christ as that which springs up, it is not merely in the bottom of the soul, but it springs up. Then in John xx. the Spirit of Christ is effective in going out in the testimony of Christ. Now we are not apostles, but God's working in us is to the intent that in these earthen vessels there should be the inflow of grace and divine love, and that it should be effective in its coming out from us.

In 2 Corinthians iv. Paul shews us the way in which he had been disciplined, "always delivered to death for Jesus' sake;" what was the effect? The life of Jesus—that pure life which was light—was manifested in his mortal flesh. Christ was his life, and the living water flowed out. The life of Jesus was effective in Paul, and yet he was but an earthen vessel, but the vessel was disciplined in order that the ministry committed to him might fully and unhinderedly be carried out. Anything that was of the life of flesh would have been a hindrance, and hence Paul was made sensible of the weakness of the vessel, persecuted, forsaken, cast down, and so on, and it is beautiful to read what he says in verse 15: "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."

He preached the gospel and he told out the mysteries of Christ, but he went through all that which disciplined the vessel, so that the grace which filled his earthen vessel might run over and abound in many, many more, and thus there might be abounding thanksgiving to God. All this is very beautiful, and gives us a deep sense of what the ministry of God's grace is. In chapter i. Paul speaks thus: "*By the grace of God* we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." Paul was a minister of the abounding grace of God, and he endured all things so that there should be no cloud upon its ministry. If we seek to minister the grace of Christ, we need the discipline of the vessel. We need to enter into the bearing upon us of the dying of Jesus, in order that that which is natural to us may be judged, and the grace of Christ in us be undimmed.

There are two ways in which we get disciplined: one, by the word of Christ which, while it builds up everything that is of Christ in us, necessarily judges everything which is not of Him. The other is through God's dealing with the vessel; He breaks it that the light may shine out, and yet supports it by His own power. None of us may have the exact discipline which Paul had. There was only one

Paul, no one else could be Paul; and there was only one Peter or John, and they were all marked out in a special way, earthen vessels in which God put His grace that its abounding might abound, and each was passed through special discipline, that the vessel might be purged, and the grace of God be undimmed in its ministration to others. People not only *heard* of God's grace from Paul's lips but they saw it manifested in him. They saw how it had affected a proud self-righteous persecutor, that he was held in the bonds of the constraining love of Christ.

It is wonderful to see the way in which God acts, and the pains He takes to form vessels, so that the grace of Christ should reach in its abounding fulness the youngest believer, and so that it should redound to His glory, and the God of all grace is worthy that it should be so. God has taken care that we should have the record of this grace, and of the way in which it was ministered, in order that His beloved people should be formed in Christ according to the thoughts of His own heart. When we look at the apostles and what they suffered, we may well lament that we are so little able to be effective ministers of the abundant grace of God. Ministry is the means by which God teaches and builds up His people in Christ; we

can thank God for the fulness that there is in Him, but we want more to follow the faith of the apostles, and of others who have gone before us, so that we may be those who commend the truth through its manifestation in us. We have the record in scripture of what the apostles ministered, but ministry is bringing to God's people the abounding grace in Christ; and when we think of the way in which they ministered, often pressed above measure, death working in them, and laying down their lives because constrained by the love of Christ, we have to own how feeble the ministry is to-day. Yet there is great comfort in the fact that Christ abides in all the fulness of His Headship, and the Spirit is here abiding as the witness to the Head in heaven.

Besides ministry there is another way by which the body of Christ is built up and grows with divine increase; it is by each individual member apprehending Christ as the Giver of grace, and so all growing up to the Head; and thus knit together in love, the life of the Head becomes manifest in the body. The youngest believer is not outside of that. You may not understand how it is effected, but each believer should be conscious of having received grace from Christ, and if He is owned as Head, there will be motions of life from the Head in those who so

own Him, and Christ will be manifested livingly in them. Thus the ministry of the apostles as we get it in scripture is continued, and becomes effective in the saints.

I would look now a little more at this apostolic ministry as it is carried out by Paul. In chapter iii. of this epistle Paul speaks of himself as a new-covenant minister in contrast with Moses who was a minister of the old covenant. The Lord Himself as Mediator of the new covenant is the contrast to Moses the mediator of the old. The Mediator is the one who brings in the covenant. Now the new covenant is not yet brought in, but the Mediator having come in, and the Spirit being here, the spirit of the new covenant is ministered, and Paul's ministry had that character, hence he contrasts his ministry with that of Moses, and also contrasts the different glory that attached to either ministry. With Moses the light of the glory that accompanied the law was veiled, but with Paul all was open and unveiled. The glory which was reflected in the face of Moses was not that of pure law, but the glory of *the ways* of God in long-suffering mercy with a people who were under law. When Moses first received the tables of the law for the people, he broke them at the foot of the mount when he saw the golden calf. At the intercession of Moses the sin of the people was passed

by, and Moses was told of God to hew out two tables of stone like unto those which he had broken, and also to make an ark of Shittim wood in which they might be placed. (Deut. x. 1, 2.) It would appear to have been a kind of preliminary ark to the one afterwards made in connection with the tabernacle. At all events, what was signified was, that the tables of the covenant were not committed to the people, but deposited in the ark—that is, in Christ. It was at the time of receiving the second tables that Moses heard the name of Jehovah proclaimed and all the mercy and grace and yet the righteousness connected with that name, and when he came down from the mount Moses' face shone with the light of the Lord's glory who had thus spoken to him. Now the glory shines in the face of Jesus Christ, and there is nothing veiled or hidden. Christ is the One in whom Jehovah's name has been made good and glorified—mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Till God had been glorified in the cross, all was necessarily veiled; even when the Lord Jesus was down here, His divine glory did not shine out, it was veiled in a tabernacle of flesh, and His ministry here was that of a blessed Man, though Godhead fulness dwelt in Him. The blessed Lord never sought honour or glory here.

“I seek not mine own glory” (John viii. 50), and yet there were moments when it was necessary to declare who He was: “Before Abraham was, I am.” But now that the cross is accomplished, and God has been glorified, the whole truth is out as to the Person of Christ. He is Son of God in power and glory, declared so in resurrection, and moreover He is Lord at God’s right hand. Occasionally when He was here His glory gleamed from behind the veil, as when He walked on the water. Like the glory in the wilderness which occasionally appeared in the cloud, but usually was veiled in it. The glory was always there, and so with the Lord when on earth. The Lord was always what He was, but He had come to tabernacle amongst men, full of grace and truth, and the tabernacle veiled His glory. Now everything in the Lord shines out in the unclouded light of God’s glory, and yet it shines out *in Him*. Everything that came out in Jesus here in that path which led to the cross is now approved by the glory, and the brightness of the glory only shews us the worth of Him who came to us as Man. The feeblest believer can look at it. The glory does not repel, but invites; the youngest Christian can look at the glory in the face of Jesus, and say, It shines in my Saviour. The glory shines there for us, every claim of right-

eousness has been met, and the heart of God has been opened out to us. The glory makes no demand on us, but it rests on the true ark of the covenant, it has found its satisfaction and abode in the Lord.

But then it shews us our inconsistencies; and we need not shrink from its beams, for we have liberty in the presence of the glory, we see in its light all that is inconsistent already condemned in the person of Him in whom the glory now shines, and the Spirit can minister Christ to us in liberty because righteousness is established in Him, and we are formed in the light of righteousness and love as we see it in the Lord, and that is liberty. There is no requirement. In Romans iii., "All have sinned," that is one thing, "and are short of the glory of God;" it is not "come short," for I do not know that there was requirement to be up to the glory of God. Israel was responsible to keep the law, but now that the glory of God has been fully manifested at the cross, man is discovered to be unfit for His presence. Now the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus who bore our judgment does not demand fitness in us, but it has transforming power as we behold it to change us into the same image. What blessed comfort and encouragement for our souls there is in such a ministry as that of the new covenant.

What a man naturally shrinks from is the thought of coming into the light of God, he dare not face it; but the new covenant ministry committed to Paul makes the blessed God known to us in light and yet in perfect love. The light and the love shine for us in Jesus, the veil has been broken down in the death of Jesus, so that they should shine for us. What a way God took to let the glory reach us not in condemning power, but in transforming power. The cross where Christ was made sin for us became the way in which the light of divine love has shone out, and it has become the way by which we can go in. Our souls breathe the atmosphere of liberty in the presence of divine love and glory. The ministry of the new covenant invites us to be in the blessed liberty of the divine glory as it shines for us in Jesus Christ. Paul was held to the glory of Christ, so that people thought he was beside himself. All in this world was nothing to him, so entirely had the love of Christ got hold of him. If he was beside himself it was to God, and if he was sober it was as taking his place with the saints in the ordinary walk of Christians here, but the blessed place he knew was in the light of God revealed in love. He was fitted to be the minister of the Christ he knew in the glory of God to people down here, and yet he could come down to the most

ordinary things and make tents and think of the need of the Corinthians. But morally as to everything here it had been dimmed for him, and eclipsed by the light of Christ's glory. He saw everything in its true character in that light. We know that death and dying are here, and we get accustomed to it, but what was before Paul's mind was that *Christ* had died, and he judged according to that. Death was God's sentence on man, and men died, Abel died, and then came in due time the death of Christ. He who alone had the title to live, He died, and that told the great truth that in the sight of God all were dead because He died for all. Looking around us at what is actually in the world—death and dying, and looking at things in the light of God are very different. But the fact of Christ having gone into death has shed another light on death, the light of love.

“ Love that on death's dark vale
Its sweetest odours spread.”

And hence the apostle held to this, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again. Before God men naturally were all in death, but life has come in by Christ, and where else could those live who are alive in His life but in the love of God? That love which has been

expressed in the death of Christ. I think this passage is sometimes understood as if it said, The love of Christ constrains us to live for Him. We ought doubtless to live *for* Christ, but the first thing is to live *to* Him. Our life as Christians has reference to Christ. He is our life. How could any of us say we lived if He were not our life? When our minds are brought into accord with Christ's cross and death, then we can say, "I am crucified with Christ." *We* were not crucified, but our minds being in accord with His cross, we can say, "I am crucified *with Christ*; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Let any one kneel down in their closet and, looking up to God, say to themselves, What am I with God? What is my life with regard to God? There could be but one answer in your soul—Christ—He is my life. I am alive to God in Him. As to ourselves, we are conscious of our own nothingness in His presence. Ah! but Christ is our life. He is before God. Everything refers to Him: "That we should live to him, that died for us, and rose again." And even down here in the ordinary details of our life, there should be the same reference to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. When Paul was making tents, his life had reference to Christ, but the first thing was that Christ was his life before God.

Now the effect of Christ having died and rose again led him further to look at every man in reference to that; he knew no man after the flesh, whether Jew or Greek, rich or poor, bond or free—the one thing for Paul was that every man was either dead to God or alive in Christ. Christ would not be known any more after the flesh, for He had died and risen again. Wonderful as it was when Christ was here among men in flesh, it is over, He has died, and now “If any man be in Christ, it is new creation: old things have passed away; new things have come to pass.” The effect of the ministry of Christ to our souls is that we get to look at things in the light of Christ and of His glory, and the more this is so with us, the more our confidence is increased, because God’s work with us is all in regard to our being formed in Christ, and we are happy in thinking of the judgment-seat. All that the judgment-seat would make manifest becomes manifest in our own consciences. We know that Christ has been made sin for us, and that He is our righteousness and our life. Hence there is transparency before God and confidence of heart. The Spirit has been given to us as the earnest of our resurrection, and of our being conformed to Christ’s body of glory; and meanwhile if called to be absent from the body there is the same confidence, it

is to be present with the Lord, and that left the spirit of Paul free to have the one desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord. It is very blessed for us to see how God wrought all this out in Paul, so that he could speak of it and minister it to us, and this gives us confidence in God's work in *us* and with *us*, not only in view of the judgment-seat, but in view of His purpose about us in Christ.

The closing up of the subject of the apostle's ministry brings out this purpose of God. It is not merely that righteousness should be ministered to us, but that we should be the righteousness of God in Christ; that refers to another scene. "In Christ" is new creation. Colossians develops this ministry of reconciliation, and the apostle in that epistle speaks of his conflict and labour in that direction. "Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." There has been the perfect settlement of the question of sin and righteousness in the cross of Christ; there He was made sin, that was the expression of God's judgment of sin, and now *in Christ* those for whom He was made sin become the expression of God's righteousness in Christ. Everything is measured by the divine glory, and that glory has found its resting-place in Christ. It is in

Him we are reconciled, and the glory of God can only approve the display of Christ in the saints.

The ministry of Paul led to this point, and it is a wonderful thought that God could form a vessel for such a ministry, bringing him to a sense of his own nothingness, and so disciplining and training him by that which he went through, that he might lead souls, as he had been led, into the light of Christ's glory, so that all else should be eclipsed but that which was formative of Christ in them. Knowing his own place by reconciliation before God in Christ, he carried out the ministry of reconciliation, its effect was that every man might be presented perfect in Christ. What more could God do than bring us into His own presence, and set us before Himself in His own dear Son, for the satisfaction of His own love. Mark the words, "Hath reconciled us *to himself* in Christ Jesus," and all is for glory to God by us. All is based on that one act, "He hath made him to be sin for us." Thus His glory is secured and His purpose carried out "that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

